

*by OCI/FE - For use as background  
in preparing President for today's Press  
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MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: CURRENT SITUATION IN LAOS

*JCG*

1. An uneasy calm has prevailed in Laos since the brief outbreak of shooting in the capital on September 9th. This outbreak resulted from what seems to have been a last minute effort on the part of the Pathet Lao to prevent the departure of Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma on his planned trip to the United Nations and various European capitals. As a result of timely diplomatic intervention by the US Ambassador and his western colleagues in Vientiane a precarious stability was restored to the Lao political scene and Souvanna Phouma left on his trip. He is presently in Paris and is expected to visit London, Moscow and New Delhi before returning to Vientiane at the end of the month. In the meantime the Pathet Lao leadership continues to abstain from participation in the coalition government and remains at its Headquarters near the Plaine des Jarres. General Phoumi, acting Prime Minister, is in charge during Souvanna Phouma's absence and has kept matters under reasonable control.

2. Beneath this uneasy surface calm there are numerous indications that the Pathet Lao and their North Vietnamese and Chinese Communist supporters are preparing for a resumption of military pressures against key neutralist positions, especially in the Plaine des Jarres. The rainy season during which operations are greatly hampered is now ending. Reports have been received of a troop buildup including an increase in North Vietnamese forces with the Pathet Lao troops in the Plaine des Jarres area in violation of the 1962 Geneva accords. The same appears to be true in central Laos where truck convoys from North Vietnam have increased in size and frequency recently following the reopening of the roads leading into this area from Vietnamese territory.

3. A significant secondary item on the picture is the fact that diplomatic initiatives by US Embassy, by the British Embassy and by the ICC have failed to obtain any information on the fate of the

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civilian crew of an American C-46 which was shot down in south central Laos on 5 September while flying a supply mission for the Vientiane Government. Five members of the six man crew are believed to survive, two of them Americans, but efforts to obtain more details on their situation and guarantees of their safety from the Pathet Lao leaders have thus far failed.